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Highlights of NAHMS Cattle and Calves Predator Death Loss Study

Each January, the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS) collects cattle data on inventory, calf crop, and total death losses for State and national estimating programs. Inventory and calf crop estimates (number of head) are published in January, while cattle and calves death losses (number of head) are published annually in April via the Meat Animals: Production, Disposition and Income report. For the January 1992, 1996, 2001, and 2006 surveys, USDA's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service's Wildlife Services and its National Animal Health Monitoring System (NAHMS) provided funding for a detailed breakdown of total losses for producer-attributed cause of loss occurring the previous year. The most recent death losses (number of head) by cause for predator and nonpredator losses were estimated and subsequently published by NASS (Cattle Death Loss, May 5, 2006).

NAHMS provided additional analysis of losses in 2005. Respective findings were first published in Cattle and Calves Nonpredator Death Loss in the United States, 2005. This second report provides additional analysis with special emphasis placed on predator causes of loss by operation size and region. When possible, the 1991, 1995, and 2000 death losses are included for comparison.

Here are a few highlights from the NAHMS Cattle and Calves Predator Death Loss in the United States, 2005 report:

Background

From 1991 to 2005, cattle death loss each year was about 2 percent of the cattle inventory. Calf death loss as a percentage of the calf crop showed a slight decline from 7.0 to 6.2 percent (1991 and 2005, respectively).

The four causes-of-loss studies show predator losses as a percentage of all losses increasing for cattle from 1.0 percent in 1991 to 2.0 percent in

2005 and for calves from 3.2 to 6.7 percent (1991 and 2005, respectively).

Just fewer than 9 of 10 cattle predator losses (87.9 percent) and over 9 of 10 calf predator losses (93.4 percent) in 2005 occurred on beef operations.

Cattle death losses due to predators

- From 1991 to 2005, coyotes, dogs, and mountain lions accounted for the highest percentages of predator death loss for cattle on all operations, respectively. Coyotes, dogs, and mountain lions also accounted for the highest percentages of predator death losses for cattle on beef operations from 2000 to 2005. In 2005, coyotes were responsible for about one-third of predator losses (32.4 percent on all operations and 31.8 percent on beef operations).
- In 2005, losses due to predators for all operations increased from 1.9 per 10,000 head of cattle 500 lb or more in 1991 to 4.2 per 10,000. For beef operations, cattle losses due to predators increased from 3.6 per 10,000 head in 2000 to 5.9 per 10,000 head in 2005.
- Beef operations with 1 to 49 cows had 9.0 losses per 10,000 head of cattle 500 lb or more due to all predator causes compared with 4.3 losses per 10,000 on operations with 500 or more head.
- Mountain lions accounted for 35.5 percent of cattle predator losses on beef operations in the Southwest region. Coyotes and/or unknown predators accounted for the highest percentages of losses on beef operations in other regions*.

*Regions:

North Central: Iowa, Minnesota, Nebraska, North Dakota, South Dakota
Northeast: Connecticut, Delaware, Illinois, Indiana, Kentucky, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Vermont, Virginia, West Virginia, Wisconsin
Northwest: Idaho, Montana, Oregon, Washington, Wyoming
South Central: Arkansas, Kansas, Missouri, Oklahoma, Texas
Southeast: Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee
Southwest: Arizona, California, Colorado, Hawaii, Nevada, New Mexico, Utah

Calf death losses due to predators

Coyotes were the single largest cause of predator losses in calves on all operations from 1991 to 2005.

- Predator losses in calves on all operations increased from 23.4 per 10,000 calves born in 1991 to 41.5 per 10,000 in 2005. For beef operations, calf losses increased from 37.8 per 10,000 calves born in 2000 to 49.6 per 10,000 in 2005.
- Losses due to all predator causes showed a clear trend across herd sizes. Beef operations with 1 to 49 cows had the highest losses, with 70.3 losses per 10,000 calves born, and operations with 500 or more cows had the lowest losses, with 34.0 losses per 10,000 calves born.
- Coyotes accounted for the highest percentages of calf predator losses on beef operations across all regions. Mountain lions accounted for more losses in the Northwest and Southwest regions than in the other regions.

Nonlethal predator control

- The percentage of all operations that used any nonlethal predator control methods increased from 3.1 percent in 2000 to 7.5 percent in 2005. Beef operations were slightly more likely than all operations to use nonlethal methods in 2000, although the difference diminished in 2005. The methods used most frequently were guard animals and fencing.
- About 1 of 10 beef operations (8.6 percent) used some type of nonlethal predator control method. The most common nonlethal method was guard animals, followed by fencing, frequent checks, and culling. Large operations (500 head or more) were more likely to use any nonlethal predator control method than smaller operations.
- Of beef operations that used a nonlethal predator control method, 80.8 percent used one nonlethal predator control method in 2000. In 2005, 67.9 percent of operations used just a single nonlethal method.

Visit the NAHMS Web site at <http://nahms.aphis.usda.gov> for the complete NAHMS Cattle and Calves Predator Death Loss in the United States, 2005 report as well as reports and information sheets on other NAHMS studies.

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For more information, contact:

USDA-APHIS-VS-CEAH
NRRC Building B, M.S. 2E7
2150 Centre Avenue
Fort Collins, CO 80526-8117
970.494.7000
E-mail: NAHMS@aphis.usda.gov

Or visit NAHMS on the Web at
<http://nahms.aphis.usda.gov>

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